

Message Text

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TO ALL AMERICAN REPUBLIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, PN

SUBJECT: PANAMA CANAL TREATY

FOLLOWING ARTICLE FROM WASHINGTON POST AUGUST 23
TRANSMITTED WHOLE:

QUOTE: 'PANAMA TREATY-SIGNING HERE WEIGHED', BY EDWARD
WALSH.

THE WHITE HOUSE IS TENTATIVELY PLANNING TO HAVE THE NEW
TREATIES GOVERNING THE PANAMA CANAL SIGNED IN WASHINGTON
EARLY NEXT MONTH, KNOWLEDGEABLE ADMINISTRATION SOURCES
SAID YESTERDAY.

AS PART OF SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT, PRESIDENT CARTER WOULD
AGREE TO FLY TO PANAMA FOR A SECOND, MORE FORMAL, SIGNING
CEREMONY IF AND WHEN THE TREATIES ARE RATIFIED BY THE
SENATE.

WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS STRESSED THAT THE PLANS FOR THE
TREATY SIGNINGS ARE NOT FINAL AND COULD CHANGE, BUT SAID
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THEY NOW REPRESENT A CONSENSUS AMONG THE PRESIDENT'S TOP
ADVISERS.

THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION CONSIDERS THE IMPENDING
BATTLE FOR RATIFICATION OF THE TREATIES TO BE A KEY TEST
OF ITS ABILITY TO CARRY OUT FOREIGN POLICY, WITH THE
OUTCOME LIKELY TO AFFECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SOVIET

UNION AND OTHER NATIONS. BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO IT, CONSIDERABLE THOUGHT AND INTERNAL DEBATE HAVE BEEN DEVOTED TO THE SUBJECT OF THE TREATIES AND HOW BEST TO OBTAIN THE TWO-THIRDS SENATE VOTE NECESSARY FOR RATIFICATION.

INITIALLY, ACCORDING TO ONE OFFICIAL, CARTER AND HIS TOP ADVISERS WERE INCLINED TOWARD A SIGNING CEREMONY IN PANAMA, GUARANTEED TO BE A WELL-PUBLICIZED EVENT AT WHICH THE PRESIDENT COULD STRESS U.S. SOLIDARITY WITH LATIN AMERICA. BUT WEIGHING AGAINST THIS WAS THE LIKELY DOMESTIC POLITICAL IMPACT, LEAVING CARTER OPEN TO CHARGES HE WAS PERSONALLY "SURRENDERING" THE CANAL, AND THE RISK OF A DISRUPTION IN PANAMA THAT COULD HARDEN OPPOSITION TO THE TREATIES.

WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS ALSO CONSIDERED HAVING THE TREATIES SIGNED IN A LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRY OTHER THAN PANAMA, BUT APPARENTLY HAVE REJECTED THAT IDEA AS TOO AWKWARD AN ATTEMPT TO CIRCUMVENT THE POTENTIAL PROBLEMS OF GOING TO PANAMA.

THE PRESIDENT IS SCHEDULED TO HAVE DINNER TONIGHT WITH SENATE MAJORITY LEADER ROBERT C. BYRD (D.W.VA.), AT WHICH THE TREATIES ARE LIKELY TO BE DISCUSSED. BYRD, WHO HOPES TO HAVE THE SENATE ADJOURN BY THE END OF OCTOBER, HAS

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ALREADY INDICATED THAT HE DOES NOT FAVOR AN EXTENDED DEBATE OVER THE TREATIES IN THE SENATE THIS YEAR.

WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS SAY THEY WILL PRESS FOR A VOTE WHEN THEY ARE SURE THEY HAVE THE 67 VOTES NECESSARY FOR RATIFICATION, A GOAL THE ADMINISTRATION IS FAR SHORT OF NOW. BUT ONE OFFICIAL RECENTLY CONCEDED THAT 'NO ONE REALLY EXPECTS A VOTE THIS YEAR.' END QUOTE.

CHRISTOPHER

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